

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

Team USDA Reinvention Summary



United States
Department of
Agriculture

September 1994

SEP 14 REC'D

To USDA Employees:

In September 1994 we celebrate the one-year anniversary of the National Performance Review report to President Clinton. Thanks to the commitment and hard work of USDA employees across the country, I am proud to say that the Department of Agriculture is in the forefront of change in the Federal government. Despite difficulties in the face of change and resistance to new ideas by some, you have made USDA one of the leaders of reinvention. I compliment you on your willingness to venture into the new territory of making USDA work better and cost less.

We are still moving toward our goal of fully reorganizing and revamping USDA from top to bottom. In the meantime, we have accomplished many other things. I appreciate the ground work laid by the internal NPR team and the time taken by many of you to provide suggestions for change. This summary is intended to give you a snapshot of the reinvention activities underway throughout USDA. I hope that you will share my enthusiasm and excitement over the vast array of new approaches to the way we do business. We are becoming a new and improved USDA—a USDA that makes the best use of all its resources to better serve its customers.

Mike Espy
Secretary of Agriculture

Contents

Introduction	2
Streamlining USDA	4
Reinvention Labs Within USDA	4
Other Reinvention Activities Within USDA	8
NPR Recommendations Specific to USDA	12
GPRA Pilots (Government Performance and Results Act)	13

Introduction

“Our goal is to i
Federal govern
expensive and
and to change
our national bu
away from complacency and
entitlement toward initiative
and empowerment. We
intend to redesign, to reinvent,
to reinvigorate the entire
national government.”

President Bill Clinton

March 3, 1993



the Clinton Administration. The team and various activities associating problems in government problems is the National team, composed of employees government and reporting to Vice President Clinton in September 1993 which contained recommendations for government. The recommendations: cutting red tape, putting customer results, and cutting back to basics to produce better government for less.

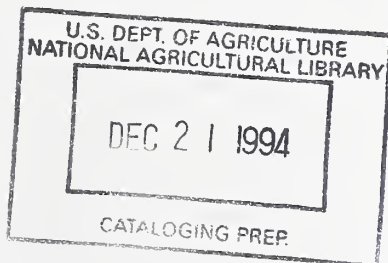
Many of the recommendations dealt with cross-cutting issues affecting all parts of government; others pertained specifically to individual departments. Some recommendations resulted in Executive Orders calling for specific actions; others tied in with complementary legislation (such as the Government Performance and Results Act). A series of “reinvention labs” were authorized to continue the process of finding new and better ways to run the government. Each Federal department was asked to do its own performance review to try to locate additional areas which needed improvement. All of these actions are part of reinventing government. They are often referred to as NPR activities.

On April 27, 1993, Secretary Espy appointed the USDA National Performance Review Team to change the way USDA performs its work. With a diverse group of approximately 25 USDA employees representing



all mission areas, this internal review team obtained views and recommendations from over 8,000 employees. They also held several employee forums and town meetings, interviews, round-table discussions, and a review of individual agency submissions. The team's findings and recommendations to the Secretary were organized into six areas: (1) rules and regulations; (2) human resource management; (3) customer service; (4) automation and technology; (5) reorganization; and (6) budget and fiscal process. Significant progress has been achieved in each of these areas and is reflected in the contents of this report.

This publication highlights many of the reinvention accomplishments and ongoing activities that have taken place throughout USDA during the past year. As a "window on reinvention," it is intended to give USDA employees a picture of change within the Department of Agriculture.



It was produced by USDA's committee for reinvention implementation, which has a representative from each mission area of the Department. Although the committee solicited as much information on reinvention activities as possible for this publication, we inevitably missed some or did not include some because they are still in the early development stage. If your accomplishments are not reflected in this publication, contact your representative to make sure he or she knows what you are doing to bring about change in USDA.

Office of the Secretary	Mitch Geasler	202-720-4175
International Affairs and Commodity Programs	Kathy Ting	202-720-1340
Food and Consumer Services	Steve Carlson	703-305-2133
Marketing and Inspection Services	Eva Ring	301-436-3582
Small Community and Rural Development	Karen Murray	202-260-4054
Natural Resources and Environment	Nat Deutsch	202-720-5982
Research, Education and Economics	Robyn Frank	301-504-5414
Chief Financial Officer	Dick Guyer	202-690-0291
Administration	Pam Brewington	202-720-3590
Communications	Martha Cashion	202-720-3310
USDA Customer Service Team	Ken Waters	202-720-5283

Streamlining USDA

As part of his commitment to streamline the Department of Agriculture, Secretary Espy identified six broad missions for a new organizational structure:

- improved services to farmers;
- rural development;
- food, nutrition, and consumer service;
- conservation;
- food quality and safety; and
- research, education, and economics.

Since many aspects of the planned reorganization require legislation, USDA submitted a legislative proposal to Congress that was introduced on September 29, 1993. Congress is expected to pass USDA reorganization legislation this year.

The effort to streamline the organization of the Department will involve a substantial reorganization of the headquarters structure and the closure or consolidation of a large number of field offices. The streamlining plan will substantially reduce USDA costs as well as make our personnel more effective. It is estimated that the Secretary's plan will enable the Department to reduce its Federal employment by over 7,500 staff years and its non-Federal county staffing by over 1,000

staff years by FY 98. As a result of the recent buyout legislation, over 3,400 USDA employees have already separated from the Department, and we anticipate another 1,700 will retire or resign next year. These reductions, in combination with hiring constraints, will enable the Department to realize some personnel savings earlier than anticipated. Over the 1994-1998 period, the Department will save approximately \$1.7 billion in personnel costs and about \$1 billion in other costs.

The streamlining plan will substantially reduce USDA costs as well as make our personnel more effective.

Reinvention Labs Within USDA

As part of reinventing government, Vice President Gore encouraged Federal agencies to establish "reinvention labs." These labs have the freedom and challenge to explore innovative ideas and test new ways of doing business. In a letter to Federal departments Gore noted, "The point is to pick a few places where we can immediately unshackle our workers so they can re-engineer their work processes to fully accomplish their missions — places where we can fully delegate authority and responsibility, replace regulations with incentives, and measure our success by customer satisfaction." USDA has a number of reinvention labs underway, including the following:

Forest Service - The Secretary of Agriculture designated the entire Forest Service as a reinvention laboratory, the only whole agency to be so designated to our knowledge. As such, the Forest Service chartered a team to help design a "Forest Service of the Future" that works better and costs less. An interim report, "Architecture for Change," was delivered to Assistant Secretary James Lyons and Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas in June

Efficient Procurement Through Empowerment at Agriculture

At the Reinvention Lab at APHIS in Gulfport, MS, a reorganization of the agency eliminated a complete layer of management and gave more responsibility and authority to each State Director—and in the Southeast Region that authority filtered down to other front-line employees who were empowered to "do what's right for the customer."

During a recent busy period at the Tampa work unit office, the computers were stolen from the inspection team's office. With cargo requiring immediate inspection and reports expected, immediate access to the computer system was necessary—a 90- to 120-day delay (typical for this type of procurement) was unthinkable. Mr. Bill Saucier, Support Services Supervisor for the Southeast Region, in his desire to "serve the customer first," called three suppliers for bids. All were below the cost of going through the agency. He placed an

order for equipment which was delivered and installed just 2 days later. To justify this bold and "unauthorized" action, he had a rubber stamp made which says "REINVENTING GOVERNMENT, Procured in Accordance with the Reinvention Laboratory Effort" and stamped his purchase receipts. Mr. Saucier saved the taxpayer a whopping \$2,200.01 per unit.

1994. The intent of the report is to stimulate discussion among customers, employees and interest groups. It includes some bold, new ideas for meeting the needs and desires of the American people for the uses, values, products, and services of our national forests and grasslands. A number of methods are being used to obtain feedback on these ideas. Decisions based on this feedback will be made this fall.

Info Share - Info Share is a multi-agency program that aims to improve service to customers of USDA's farm service, rural development, and natural resources agencies. Info Share represents a new way of doing business, as USDA looks at how it currently functions and then comes up with new ways to operate. There are multiple initiatives under the umbrella of this program, including near-, mid-, and long-term projects. The results have proved to be dramatic in some cases. For example, one initiative improved customer service by reducing the amount of time needed for processing cotton loans from five days using a manual system to as little as 18 minutes with a new automated system. Initial testing in 200 cotton-producing

counties indicated a high level of acceptance and satisfaction by both customers and field personnel. Based on these findings, the project will be implemented in all 550 cotton-producing counties in the fall of 1994.

Dispute Resolution Boards - The Office of Civil Rights Enforcement has provided a new and innovative method for resolving disputes. The Dispute Resolution Boards Pilot project brings the parties involved in a dispute together at an early stage to discuss the issues. These Boards have proved to be an effective way of providing a forum for discussion of the relevant circumstances of each case and facilitating a settlement. This has led to substantial cost savings by reducing the time required to process each complaint. Beyond monetary savings, this system produces immeasurable human resource savings to both parties by reducing the length of many complaints and the degenerative impact on working relationships. USDA is looking at ways to implement many of the successes of the pilot project as a permanent model for effective dispute resolution.

Coordinating Program Resources for Customer Support Through Public-Private Partnerships - The Extension Service has partnered with the National 4-H Council to demonstrate that program issues and products can be developed and provided with resources more effectively when public and private sectors work together. As a result of this partnership, a variety of publications, curriculums, and training programs have been developed that focus on water quality, children, youth, families at risk, and communities in economic transition.

Meeting Customer Needs - The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) has established a National Business Reinvention Laboratory in Fort Worth, TX. Collocated with a National Technical Center serving states in the South, the lab is a business office serving those states and operating on the theme of moving "from paper to people." The lab will be a testing ground for many streamlining ideas in administrative areas, including ideas growing out of an SCS National Performance Review Conference held in August 1994.

Improved Records Management Reinvention Lab

Billy Johnson of the National Computer Center in Kansas City, MO, is determined to save money for the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Johnson's enthusiasm for moving USDA toward a paperless environment is infectious. He conservatively estimates savings of tens of millions of dollars over the next few years as USDA agencies implement the Automated Records Management System solution.

The computer storage and automation systems will manage the complete life cycle of records from the simplest memorandum to more complex scientific reports and geographic maps. The system will provide a direct link with Info Share agencies, other USDA agencies, and the National Records Center of the National Archives and Records Administration. Management of records is accomplished electronically through a sophisticated Departmental index.

Users of the system will have the flexibility to locate or receive records from any-

where in the system regardless of computer platform or location. Government forms will be electronically stored rather than on paper.

Henry (Hank) Bauer, Director of the National Computer Center, points out the increasing need to have access to more information faster is causing managers to rethink how information is maintained and distributed. An automated document management system could help managers make faster decisions by having more information at their fingertips. The more rapidly we change to an automated solution, the sooner the benefits.

Organizational Change: Toward Improved Information and Educational Technology - An improved interactive citizen government communication system has developed through Americans Communicating Electronically (ACE). As part of the ACE and reinvention laboratory efforts, the White House, the Extension Service, MIT, and the University of North Carolina have provided electronic access to White House information releases. In addition, the Extension Service has worked extensively with other agencies to promote electronic access to digital documents on disaster relief, the AmeriCorps National Service Program, NAFTA, GATT, health care reform, NPR, and the National Information Infrastructure. In addition, the Extension Service formed a partnership with the Rural Development Administration which allowed nationwide electronic access to RDA Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities materials.

Simplifying Rulemaking - The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has designed new review procedures for APHIS regulations, based on the concept that the amount of

review should be proportionate to the complexity and significance of the regulation. APHIS negotiated waivers with USDA's Office of General Counsel and policy levels and the Office of Management and Budget, reducing by about one third the number of regulations reviewed by those offices. In addition, APHIS implemented the government's first use of an electronic bulletin board, accessible through modem dial-in and Internet, to accept comments on proposed rulemaking. APHIS also is piloting other on-line projects to improve communication with customers and the public on APHIS rulemaking.

Streamlining the Travel Accounting Process - The Foreign Agricultural Service is developing an automated system to more accurately estimate travel costs and to process routine vouchers in one day or less by using electronic (rather than manual) signatures and transmitting the vouchers electronically.

Emphasizing Prevention in Pre-Harvest Food Safety - The National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) is an APHIS program that provides data to producers

and consumers on safety of food prior to processing. APHIS and state veterinarians who visit and collect data from livestock producers were surveyed for their ideas on how to improve NAHMS information products. As a result of the surveys, NAHMS now increasingly delivers brief interpretive fact sheets to provide information the way producers and the field force prefer to receive it. APHIS is currently disseminating NAHMS information electronically to reach a broader audience.

Empowering Employees Through Self-Directed Work Teams - An APHIS self-directed work team located at the Agricultural Quarantine and Inspection Station in Miami, FL, is ensuring that pests and diseases that could be harmful to U.S. agriculture are not introduced via traveling passengers. Previously, many considered this section of the port to be the most undesirable to work. Morale and job devotion have increased significantly since employees were restructured as a self-directed work team.

Minneapolis Procurement Reinvention Lab

The Minneapolis Field Servicing Office procurement team saved half a million dollars for their Department of Agriculture customers this year. They intend to double that this coming year. The money was saved by working smarter and utilizing government discounts and vendors.

Prominently displayed on a 10-foot-tall chart which looks like a huge thermometer is the cumulative total entitled "Degree of

Savings." When savings are made by an employee an announcement is made to the staff, the buyer is congratulated, and the savings are added to the thermometer. The team now completes 90 percent of all purchase orders within 24 hours of receipt with an error rate of less than 1 percent. The focus is on providing exceptional service to their customers and customer satisfaction is high. Does this sound like an office that you'd like to work in? Today it is. Yesterday, it was much different.

In the "Black Hole Days of '87-'88," as they are now characterized, stacks of purchase orders were found hidden in drawers. Phone messages were routinely thrown away on the assumption that if they were really important, then someone would eventually call back to check. Employees often found reasons to be sick and supervisors reacted with threats and with disciplinary measures. The stress on employees and supervisors was incredible and it was reflected by a 30 percent turnover rate. Today, absences are down

SCS Wetlands Team - The Soil Conservation Service has created a Wetlands Team to lead its efforts to identify, restore, and preserve wetlands. The 15-person self-directed team is interdisciplinary (soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, biologists, public affairs specialists) and is outside the normal organizational structure of the agency. It is designed to facilitate an ecosystem-based approach and to remove institutional constraints that could stand in the way of effectively addressing wetlands issues. Its activities will be evaluated as a possible prototype, both for field handling of wetlands issues and for addressing other critical issues quickly and effectively.

Enhancing Service Delivery Through Decentralization - The APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine's (PPQ) South East Region in Gulfport, MS, is made up of over 600 employees. In January 1994, PPQ's Southeast Region became the first PPQ region to eliminate the Assistant Regional Director (ARD) level in PPQ's organizational hierarchy. The State Plant Health Directors can now make many of the decisions that had

been made by the former ARD. Each state is establishing State Plant Health Committees to coordinate program activities and maximize program delivery between PPQ and the state cooperator.

Expanding Options for User Fees Collection - At the National Veterinary Services Laboratory operated by APHIS, a more customer-oriented billing and collections system is being developed. In addition, a new reagent request form, which will ensure that necessary and complete information is received from the customer, and updated Diagnostic Reference and Reagents User Manuals are being developed. In order to obtain feedback concerning their success, the lab is working on a self-addressed, postage-paid service evaluation card.

Focusing on Results in Resource Management - The APHIS Resource Management Support Staff for its International Services Program is using Process Improvement Teams to improve specific administrative systems. The Process Improvement Teams are unusual because they include both stakeholders and traditionally "adver-

sarial" customers and partners. Some successes of the teams include a collaboration with the State Department to conduct the first retirement seminars for APHIS employees in Mexico City and Tuxtla Gutierrez. They have also worked with other APHIS management offices to write new policies and manuals which adequately address the needs of their international staff in areas such as vehicle and aircraft management, and household furniture and appliances. Another team has automated disbursements for international cooperative programs.

Morale and job devotion have increased significantly since employees were restructured as a self-directed work team.

and the turnover rate has dropped to 3 percent. Workload has dramatically increased while staffing has dropped by 30 percent, yet the quality of work has greatly increased.

What changed for these employees? Why are they now so upbeat and proud of the work that they do? Why is there such an obvious commitment to first-class service? What is the secret, you may ask? The answer, according to director David Gradick is the empowerment of employees accomplished through an intensive

training program and development of self-directed work teams. It is listening to employees and assisting them to solve their problems. The answer is removing the barriers from the path of those who do the work.

The leadership of Dave Gradick and his management team has enabled Stacye Tyler and a team of 20 employees to begin the process of marketing skills of the entire office to the rest of the government and to begin a strategy for showcasing FSO's unique, team-based support service to the

public and to potential customers. Stacye says, "We've built a new philosophy around customer service, and we're going to take in on the road." That is what "reinvention" is all about.

Other Reinvention Activities Within USDA

In addition to having reinvention labs, USDA also has a number of other reinvention activities underway. The following are examples of those activities.

Customer Service - At its core, customer service is a combination of listening to customers, meeting their needs, and ensuring their satisfaction. In January 1994, Deputy Secretary Rominger assembled a group dedicated to improving customer service to form the USDA Customer Service Team. Mr. Rominger laid out two goals for the team. First, they were to guide the Department in responding to Executive Order 12862 "Setting Customer Service Standards." Second, they were to lay the groundwork for transforming USDA into a customer-driven organization.

The team wrote and compiled a survey notebook as a guide for developing survey instruments and getting those instruments approved. Seeing an opportunity to raise awareness, the team led the Department's involvement in the Federal Quality Institute's Quality Conference. Ninety employees attended the conference in which Secretary Espy delivered the keynote speech on creating customer-driven government.

Looking for other training opportunities, the team helped FQI refine its course on "Putting Customers First." They did this by contributing to early design sessions and then piloting the completed course. To encourage more informal learning, the team held weekly open meetings to share the guidance received from the National Performance Review staff. The meetings became a forum for sharing ideas on

how to improve customer service and become a customer-driven organization.

Under the team's leadership, each agency, staff office, and mission area developed a customer service plan to guide their activities for the next five years. Eight agencies produced public, customer-oriented plans to be published in September. These plans outline what specific USDA customers can expect from USDA programs. By mid-September, the team will present a strategy for transforming USDA into a customer-driven organization.

Procurement - In February 1994, the Secretary appointed a Performance Review Task Force to perform a comprehensive analysis of USDA's acquisition programs. A highly qualified and diverse group of employees from USDA's agencies organized themselves into sub-teams to focus on three critical procurement areas: Commodity Procurement, Federal Acquisition Regulation Procurement, and Grants and Agreements.

The sub-teams consulted with managers, staff, vendors, and recipients of the Department's procurement activities. They poured over 1,000 responses from these and other stakeholders eager to contribute their ideas about improving USDA's procurement process. From these comments, they developed 33 issue papers with recommendations. These papers and recommendations were compiled into a Procurement Review Task Force Report. The report projects savings of more than \$31 million and identifies ways to put customers first, empower employees, streamline operations, and cut red tape. The report's recommenda-

tions have been implemented in the following areas to date. Additional recommendations are being phased into the Department's overall procurement program.

- A USDA Procurement Council has been established to provide the leadership and guidance needed for the procurement community as a whole and to work in concert with the Department's procurement executive.
- The Department has expanded significantly both the use and threshold levels of its commercial credit card program.
- The Department has implemented a third party draft program that has already shown positive benefits in helping Departmental personnel accomplish their work in a timely fashion. This has been particularly true in furthering USDA initiatives in rural America.
- The Department is developing a comprehensive approach to the education and training of procurement professionals, which has direct implications on the levels of contracting authority authorized for employees.

FISVIS - The Financial Information Systems Vision and Strategy (FISVIS) project focuses on providing reliable, timely, accurate, and consistent financial information when and where managers need it. It represents a commitment of USDA to reinvent financial management. Implementing FISVIS will enable the Department to reduce the cost of processing financial data by replacing old systems. In addition, FISVIS will reduce significantly the time it takes to prepare and audit

financial statements. Further, FISVIS will allow field and headquarters offices to eliminate duplicate records (e.g., cuff records), improve current funds control processes, significantly simplify reconciliation procedures, and provide data on an "as needed" basis. These improvements will permit staff to be redirected to other activities. The FISVIS project includes the implementation of the following initiatives:

- **Single Integrated Financial System.** This project envisions a single, integrated financial management system by 1998 with initial major activities being completed during 1994, 1995, and 1996. The system will consist of a unified set of discrete financial systems and the financial portion of mixed systems linked electronically using common data definitions and guidelines. It will be designed to interact and will be fully compatible with program and other information systems.
- **Financial Standards.** USDA has developed and is implementing financial information standards applicable Department-wide. These standards will reduce redundancy and increase consistency of financial information.

Fiscal Processes - On April 1, 1994, the Department achieved a significant milestone in ensuring standard, uniform, consistent financial information. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) issued the first Department-wide Financial and Accounting Standards Manual and Financial Management Information Architecture. These documents provide: (1) a uniform set of standard accounting definitions; (2) a chart of accounts; and (3) a

Department-wide standard general ledger. They ensure that financial systems of the future are consistent among USDA agencies.

The Office of the CFO is working to strengthen the partnership between USDA's program managers and financial managers. A USDA-wide video conference on financial management was held June 27, 1994, followed by a retreat for financial and program managers. Both communicated the financial implications of management decisions and emphasized the importance of financial management information and services to improve program management. Also, the Office of the CFO is leading an effort to develop a financial management training program for program managers.

Additionally, the Office of the CFO is working in partnership with other Federal departments to: (1) explore the feasibility of implementing a litigation tracking system to monitor claims referred for foreclosure and debt collection litigation; (2) develop a government-wide Financial Information System; and (3) form a credit reform task group.

Franchising Services - USDA is a leader in the Federal government in providing financial and administrative system services to other Federal departments. USDA's National Finance Center provides payroll/personnel services to 41 Federal departments and agencies and their 355,000 employees; thrift savings plan services to 2.3 million participating Federal employees; and health care benefits information services to 18,800 former Federal employees and beneficiaries.

Human Resources Management - In his NPR report, Vice President Gore singled out the Federal Personnel Manual (FPM) as an example of an outdated, outmoded regulation and rule-driven personnel system unresponsive to the needs of its customers. In response to the elimination of the FPM, most of USDA's Departmental Personnel Manual (DPM) also has been eliminated. The remaining portions of the DPM are being put in electronic media to make them accessible to employees through the Department's local area network and other networks.

In addition, Secretary Espy developed and promulgated a comprehensive equal opportunity policy statement that conveys his personal commitment to workforce diversity and the fair and equitable treatment of all USDA employees and customers. The Secretary has also revamped the Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights critical element used in performance evaluations in response to employee requests for a more specific description and better defined levels of attainment. The USDA awards program was revamped to promote the Team USDA concept by consolidating individual agency awards ceremonies into one Celebration of Excellence. USDA has created an 18-point plan for reinventing the USDA awards process, which emphasizes teamwork, equity, simplicity, empowerment, and accountability.

Labor-Management Partnerships - Within 60 days of the issuance of the President's Executive Order on Labor-Management Partnerships, the USDA Partnership Council was established at the Department level with the two labor unions which have national consultation rights, the American Federa-

tion of Federal Employees and the National Federation of Government Employees. The USDA Partnership Council was one of the first in the Federal government. This Council meets twice a month by teleconference and quarterly in person to provide the labor unions input into the decisional phase of management. The Council has been effectively used to discuss policy changes prior to a final determination being made. Partnership councils are also being established in many of the 84 bargaining units throughout the Department.

MAP - USDA is involved in a comprehensive effort to redesign how administrative work should be performed across functional lines, including personnel, procurement, travel management, and property accountability. The focus is on re-engineering, streamlining, and automating administrative work processes. The Modernization of Administrative Processes (MAP) Program, a major initiative under direct leadership of the Assistant Secretary for Administration, is responsible for leading this effort throughout the organization.

The Redesigning Administrative Processes and Systems (RAPS) component of MAP seeks to streamline and design cost-effective administrative processes and systems through business process reengineering and systems integration.

During FY 94, the RAPS project will complete an implementation strategy, an information strategic plan, and complete business process reengineering projects to address immediate concerns. During FY 95, RAPS will continue in-depth business area analy-

sis of the administrative functions to streamline processes and subsequently automate, if appropriate. MAP and the Office of Information Resources Management will work together to develop standard tools and methodologies to assist in business process improvement.

MAP's Organizational Development for Change (ODC) component provides the structure that supports the MAP effort to bring about change in USDA. It focuses on quality and customer service concepts and organizational development actions needed to improve the administrative business areas throughout the Department. The goal of this initiative is to create an environment which supports redesigning business processes, responsible risk taking, creative and innovative thinking, employee involvement, and measurement of results.

During FY 94 and FY 95, the ODC effort will conduct three surveys that assess organizational culture, customer satisfaction, and management practices affecting motivation and performance. The results of these surveys will provide a benchmark for measuring the impact of efforts to strengthen and improve USDA's internal administrative operations and procedures and its service to customers.

Automation and Technology Improvements - A Data Management Policy and Data Element Standardization Manual has been published to establish a data management policy. This will facilitate data sharing among agencies and reduce "data stovepipes."

The Department has completed its first Strategic Telecommunications Plan to

guide future investments and ensure USDA participation in the National Information Infrastructure.

A telecommunication cost-optimization model has been developed. The model identifies office locations in which consolidation of commercial telecommunications services will improve service. Projected costs savings of as much as \$8,000 to \$10,000 per office per month have been projected when the model results are used to guide new service installations.

An upgrade of the local area network to high-speed fiber optics is in progress in the USDA headquarters complex in Washington, D.C.

School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children - Research reveals that there is a link between diet and health, and that diet-related diseases often begin in childhood. Most school meals, however, do not now meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. After nearly a year of unprecedented effort to seek public input, USDA developed a four-point Framework for Action to reduce fat and saturated fat in school meals, provide training, get the best value, and cut paperwork. The centerpiece of the plan is a proposed regulation, open to public comment until September 8.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot - USDA's Food and Nutrition Service will increase the variety of fresh fruits and vegetables available to schools through a pilot program with the Department of Defense (DOD). DOD will act as a procurement agent for USDA, accepting orders directly from states or local school food authorities. Orders will be charged against the state's commodity entitlement.

Strengthening Debt Collection Programs - Farmers Home Administration is in the process of acquiring a new mortgage loan servicing system for the Single Family Housing Program. A work group is reviewing systems used by other lenders and working with a contractor to modify a vendor-developed system to meet the needs of the agency. This will improve the agency's ability to service its mortgage loans by providing up-to-date information, more efficient debt collection efforts, and improved automation of repetitive tasks. This is targeted for implementation in October 1996.

NPR Coordinators in SCS - The Soil Conservation Service has designated "NPR Coordinators" in every state and in headquarters. Ideas for reinventing the agency were solicited from employees and managers across the nation. The response was overwhelming. More than 700 ideas poured in, ranging from improving customer service in program areas to streamlining administrative processes to reorganizing the agency. A national conference for all SCS NPR coordinators was held in August 1994. The conference attendees were empowered to consider all the ideas submitted thus far and make determinations. Implementation of the conference recommendations began this month.

Suspending Reconstitutions - The Soil Conservation Service has suspended "reconstitutions" (paperwork necessary to amend conservation plans and records when there is a change in farm or tract operation or ownership). Some field offices were spending as much as 30 to 40 percent of staff time keeping up with this red tape burden; this took time away from customer ser-

vice and getting conservation on the land. Many field office employees, now empowered, have eliminated this non-essential paperwork, thus freeing up much more time for direct field assistance to customers.

Streamlining Procurement in SCS - Locations all over Soil Conservation Service have been dismantling the elaborate procedural hoops used to make simple purchases of equipment and supplies. SCS uses third party drafts and empowers local employees to make payments directly to suppliers. District Conservationists in Nebraska have third-party draft procurement authority to \$500, eliminating cumbersome paperwork requirements. In Hawaii, 46 percent of all SCS employees in the state have been provided credit cards and empowered to determine when purchases are needed. In the South National Technical Center (Ft. Worth, TX), the average number of written purchase orders needed annually dropped from 1,800 to 450 through the use of third-party drafts and credit cards, and by increasing the number of authorized buyers on blanket purchase agreements.

Electronic Release of FAS Reports - The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) is increasing the availability and reducing the access costs of its country reports to the private sector. These are the unofficial reports, submitted by the FAS overseas offices, which contain the latest information on foreign production, demand, trade, and outlook for food and agricultural products. FAS has established Memorandums of Understanding with the Department of Commerce (DOC) to release the reports on a daily basis over DOC's electronic bulletin board (EBB) and on a monthly

basis via its National Trade Data Bank (NTDB), a CD-ROM subscription service. FAS envisions this initiative will result in a significant reduction in the number of subscribers to its hard copy distribution program and requests for hard copies of back reports. The NTDB and EBB have about 7,500 direct subscribers, including 900 Federal depository libraries with public access. The EBB is accessible through Internet. Implementation of this activity will result not only in improved customer service, but also in economies of FAS personnel and space resources. Plans call for the initial release over the EBB this fall and on the NTDB's September 1994 CD-ROM.

*The USDA
Partnership Council
was one of the first
in the Federal
government.*

NPR Recommendations Specific to USDA

The NPR report made not only cross-cutting suggestions for change in the Federal government, but also recommendations specific to USDA programs. The status of those recommendations is as follows:

End the Wool and Mohair Subsidy -

In 1954 the National Wool Act was enacted to encourage an increase in domestic production of wool by providing direct payments to farmers based on a percentage of their market sales. Although by 1960 wool was no longer considered a strategic resource, the wool subsidies continued. In response to the NPR, legislation has been enacted that will eliminate the Federal support payments for wool and mohair after 1995.

Eliminate Federal Support for

Honey - The honey program, which has been in place since 1950, allows beekeepers to obtain a Federal loan using the honey they produce as collateral. Market forces have overcome the original need for the program. Honey program subsidies have been suspended for 1994 marketings during fiscal year 1994. Legislation to eliminate Federal support for honey has been passed by the House and is awaiting action in the Senate.

Reorganize USDA to Better Accomplish its Mission and Streamline its

Field Structure - USDA is no longer strictly a "farm" organization. However, the headquarters of the Department is not effectively organized at either the subcabinet or agency levels to carry out the diverse missions of USDA. The Secretary has developed a plan to structure USDA to organize the agencies to provide cohesive direction for the Department's programs. The

Senate has passed its version of reorganization legislation. The House Agriculture Committee has approved its version and action by the full House is pending. A conference committee will have to work out differences in the legislation before final passage of a reorganization bill will occur.

Implement a Consolidated Farm

Management Plan - As farmers attempt to comply with environmental and conservation laws and regulations, they are often confronted with dealing with multiple agencies having conflicting requirements and goals. A Consolidated Farm Management Plan will consolidate various USDA agency plans into a single plan and go beyond only USDA-required actions, covering conservation programs in the Environmental Protection Agency, the Corps of Engineers, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. USDA developed a strategy to work with these agencies and will issue guidance on the implementation of the Consolidated Farm Management Plan by March 1995.

Administer the Employment and Training Requirement for Food Stamp Recipients More Effectively and Efficiently - Although a primary goal of the Food Stamp Program (FSP) is moving food stamp recipients from welfare to work, 1988 USDA research found that the employment and training program administered by the FSP did not increase participants' earnings. The Department is considering legislative proposals to amend the Food Stamp Act to strengthen the employment and training component and require participation in more effective employment and training programs.

Encourage Better Food Package Management and Facilitate Multi-state Contracts - The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was established in 1972 to improve the health of at-risk, low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children under age five by providing supplemental foods, nutrition and health education, and health screening. One recommendation stated that USDA should contain costs in the WIC food package for additional items. The Department is working with states to include infant cereal, juice, and other foods in individual and multi-state rebate contracts. A second recommendation stated USDA should expand its role in disseminating "best practices" information to states interested in pursuing multi-state cost-containment efforts. The Department is providing monthly information to states on award contracts and providing review of bids to include best practices.

Deliver Food Stamp Benefits Via Electronic Benefits Transfer - The processes of printing and distributing food coupons, plus providing oversight and monitoring of state, food outlet, and financial institution operations, are costly and labor-intensive. On May 31, 1994, the Federal Electronic Benefits Task Force submitted a plan calling for the rapid implementation of a nationwide Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system to deliver government benefits, including food stamps, electronically. In partnership with the Food and Nutrition Service, 38 states are at some stage of planning for EBT; 7 of these are already using EBT to deliver food stamp benefits.

GPRA Pilots (Government Performance and Results Act)

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 established guidelines and timeframes for outcome-oriented strategic plans throughout the Federal government. OMB was charged with designating pilot operations to explore the problems and share the lessons learned in developing performance measures for the government.

USDA is well on its way toward implementing GPRA, with development of the eight pilot performance measurement projects listed below. Performance plans for each of these pilots will be submitted to the Chief Financial Officer on September 15, 1994.

The **Farmers Home Administration** (FmHA) has developed a model for performance measures for the approximately \$2.5 billion Single Family Housing Program, covering insurance and guarantees of loans for low and very low income families in rural areas. The performance plan includes performance goals relating to loan portfolio quality, payment delinquencies, loan servicing activities, and management of acquired property. In addition to utilizing output measures, FmHA hopes to develop outcome and context measures. The project will compare model performance measures to existing FmHA performance measures, in order to identify opportunities for improvement in the areas of customer service, program outreach, and program management. The performance plan has been submitted to the House Agriculture Appropriations Committee at their request.

The **Office of Communications** plans participation in the pilot by the entire agency. Performance goals include

steps and guidelines to promote and facilitate the dissemination of high-quality communication with greater outreach.

The **Soil Conservation Service** has designated three programs as GPRA pilots: Conservation Operations, Snow Survey and Water Forecasting, and the Soil Survey programs. The Soil Survey Program focuses, in part, on maintaining a current and comprehensive National Soils Information System, and making and interpreting soil surveys. The Snow Survey Program will emphasize increasing the usefulness and effectiveness of snow survey data for water management. All of Conservation Operations will be piloted, measuring the impact of conservation plans on 20-25 million acres of private land and of technical assistance to over two million program participants.

The **Forest Service** in its entirety is designated as a GPRA pilot, with performance goals structured on an ecosystem management approach, factoring multiple-use natural resource outputs, resource conditions, and future resource states. In this context, performance measurement incorporates an ecological approach to achieving multiple-use management, blending the needs of people and environmental values to provide healthy, productive, and sustainable ecosystems that also meet human needs. Over 41,000 FTEs and annual spending of \$3.3 billion are included in the pilot.

The **Office of Civil Rights Enforcement** (OCRE) is the only civil rights organization in the Federal government participating as a GPRA pilot. OCRE staff members, trained to function as GPRA implementation teams, will

address the following agency goals: (1) Create and maintain a positive work environment that supports teamwork, values diversity, and encourages all employees to realize their full potential; (2) Create an environment for change within USDA that will result in involvement and program delivery through the use of special emphasis programs; (3) Create a problem-solving approach for discrimination complaints that includes timely and efficient case processing, promotes resolution by affected parties, and reduces the overall financial burden to the Department; (4) Develop and implement an evaluation system that measures organizational and individual accountability in providing equal opportunity in employment and in delivery of programs and services. The pilot project covers representation of EEO targeted groups in the USDA workforce, as well as the number and responsiveness to complaints. Specific performance indicators, measurement strategies, and survey instruments are being developed to determine the effectiveness of targeted program activities.

The **Extension Service** conducts seven base programs and eight national initiatives. Four of the eight national initiatives form the pilot program. These include (1) communities in economic transition, including job, business, and market creation, and increase in tourism; (2) plight of young children, including fostering development of children in limited resource families; (3) decisions for health, including childhood immunization and community health initiatives; and (4) food safety and quality, including reducing the incidents of food-borne illness. The pilot involves 1,200 FTEs at the state

and local levels, testing the feasibility of developing indicators to assess the extent to which these programs are achieving their set goals. Strategic objectives, performance goals, and outcome indicators have been developed for pilots currently being conducted in New York, Alabama, Texas, Ohio, Iowa, Colorado, and Idaho.

The Packers and Stockyards Administration will pilot a project for its Scales and Weighing Branch. This branch is responsible for a national program to assure proper and honest operation of weighing devices. The project includes specific goals for the two major activities of the Scales and Weighing Program: investigating the weighing of livestock and maintaining accurate scales. Measurement performance goals are being developed to assess the quality level and the monetary impact of scale tests and weighing investigations. The proficiency of scale tests will be validated and the compliance of weighing investigations will be verified.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is piloting a performance measurement project for its Agricultural Quarantine Inspection (AQI) Program, to test program performance measures, monitoring for results, and reporting. The AQI program is designed to prevent the entry of exotic animal and plant pests and diseases into the United States, through regulation and inspection activities. In excess of 1,500 FTEs will be covered by the pilot, which will also engage customers in helping to define measures that can be used to assess the program's outcomes and impact.

*We are becoming a
new and improved
USDA—a USDA that
makes the best use of
all its resources to
better serve its
customers.*



NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY

1022436373

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA Office of Communications at (202) 720-5881 (voice) or (202) 720-7808 (TDD).

To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call (202) 720-7327 (voice) or (202) 720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity employer.



1022436373